

CORRESPONDENCE

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Sterilization¹

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—On August 9th of this year the *Daily Worker* published a feature article by Professor Haldane, "They Want to Sterilize the Poor." It was accompanied by a photograph of a number of babies in their cots, with the caption: "Britain needs babies—but if the American sterilizers have their way, many poor men and women will be deprived of the chance of parenthood." The article was a review of Dr. R. L. Dickinson and Dr. Clarence Gamble's booklet, *Human Sterilization. Techniques of Permanent Conception Control* (Waverly Press, Inc., New York, 1950), a complementary publication to Dr. Dickinson's earlier *Techniques of Conception Control* (Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore, 1942).

Presumably Professor Haldane is entitled, if he wishes, to review in the light of political ideology and not in his capacity as a scientist. We may also assume that he was not responsible for the layout and the emotion-loaded headings of his article. Nevertheless, the account given here of a serious medical work is both unfair and misleading. The booklet (which may be seen in the *Society's* library) is intended chiefly as a manual for surgeons and urologists, bringing them up to date on operative techniques, and reviewing the indications, social as well as medical, when sterilization may be undertaken. There are numerous diagrammatic drawings by Dr. Dickinson, a summary of legal provisions, and an extensive bibliography. The booklet was on display at the International Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in New York last May, and attracted wide interest.

The authors' eugenic philosophy is contained in a sentence from their introduction: "Developing the most desirable sort of citizens involves providing the best candidates with aid toward fertility whenever aid is needed, while at the same time curtailing the progeny of the feeble-minded and those who have borne all the children to whom they can do justice." They believe that sterilization should be more often offered to

couples where permanent protection from pregnancy is indicated, either on grounds of physical or mental health, or of excessive multiparity (a common feature of the high birth-rate states of Southern U.S.A.). Though the wording of the statement cited above might lend itself to an authoritarian interpretation, the authors' aims in fact are basically humanitarian and democratic.

Professor Haldane, however, imputes various disreputable motives to Drs. Dickinson and Gamble and their supporters. He suggests to the readers of the *Daily Worker* that (*inter alia*) sterilization in America is directed *against* the poor, and *against* the Negroes, that it is irresponsibly applied to child defectives, and that its practice in general is comparable to that in Nazi Germany. Professor Haldane also hints that the illustrations by Dr. Dickinson have pornographic rather than scientific interest.

Having spent eighteen months making a first-hand study of sterilization in U.S.A., and being personally well acquainted with both the authors, I knew that the picture presented by Professor Haldane from his reading of the booklet was incorrect. I therefore wrote asking if I could come to see him, and give an account of what was really happening about sterilization, and particularly how it was regarded by poor women who had had the operation. There was no reply to my letter.

I then telephoned the features editor of the *Daily Worker*, outlined my experience, and asked if I might submit an article on sterilization which would give another point of view. The editor expressed considerable interest, told me the required length, and said I should send something in. I did so, putting my account in popular form appropriate to the medium. Several weeks later the article was returned with an apologetic note from the features editor, regretting that he was unable to use it after all.

I am sending this letter to the *REVIEW* in order that my opinion should somewhere be put on record that the *Daily Worker's* article was biased.

MOYA WOODSIDE.